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Abstract
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Comments
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Chapter 2

"The Herbage of Death"

Haunted Environments in John Neal and James Fenimore Cooper

Matthew Wynn Sivils

Nature is a Haunted House—but Art—a House that tries to be haunted.

—Emily Dickinson to T. W. Higginson (1876)

Dickinson wrote this enigmatic, single-sentence letter without commentary, but while she did not elaborate on her assertion, she seems conscious of how the idea of haunting emerges in artistic endeavors as well as in general perceptions of the nonhuman environment—here conceived of as a haunted house. To be sure, many of the American literary works that preceded Dickinson fall under the category of those that try "to be haunted." And these texts that strive to house the ethereal and uncanny comment on the first part of her statement by presenting an imagined environment inhabited by spectral entities and marred by violence.

My purpose in this chapter is to explore the literary "haunting" that results from a conflicted U.S. cultural identity borne of human violence in a threatening land, especially as it relates to America's dark legacy of wars with, and removal of, indigenous populations. Specifically, I examine how John Neal and James Fenimore Cooper—two aesthetically divergent originators of American fiction—offer surprisingly similar portrayals of a frontier disturbed by acts of brutality. Focusing on these two early American novelists, in association with their literary forebear Charles Brockden Brown, I investigate how Neal and Cooper invented a national literary environment tainted by blood and haunted by the violence enacted upon its soil, a violence so often linked to the genocidal treatment of American Indians as well as to those transatlantic wars that define the period. I further argue that each of these authors associate this violence and trauma with the creation of a distinctive American literary setting

that transcends superficial descriptions of a sublime landscape to dwell instead on the artifacts of injustice buried within the earth.

In her study of how "American literature has been haunted by ghostly Indians," Renée L. Bergland asks, "Why must America write itself as haunted?" and answers that "the interior logic of the modern nation requires that citizens be haunted, and that American nationalism is sustained by writings that conjure forth spectral Native Americans. In American letters, and in the American imagination, Native American ghosts function both as representations of national guilt and as triumphant agents of Americanization."[1] Bergland's observation proves especially astute when applied to writers such as Brown, Neal, and Cooper who were self-consciously, even heavy handedly, nationalistic and who viewed their works as components of the larger literary project of writing the U.S. into cultural existence. They were not, however, unapologetic about their portrayals of (and roles in) the project of cultural removal that is complicit in the composition of an imaginary American frontier populated with equally imaginary Native Americans.

Elsewhere I have argued that Brown makes a case for Native American sovereignty in the ethereal Delaware elder Old Deb,[2] and I find it equally persuasive that Cooper and Neal offer sympathetic characterizations of Native Americans that transcend the simple noble savage stereotype. Though problematic in their ethnocentricity, such recognitions of the humanity of Native Americans are what separate the novels of Brown, Cooper, and Neal from that of an Indian-hating writer such as Robert Montgomery Bird, who in his oft-quoted preface to his novel *Nick of the Woods* (1837) refuses to consider Native Americans as anything but "ignorant, violent, debased, brutal" and who makes explicit his project of refuting the sympathetic portrayals of Native Americans found in Cooper's tales.[3] Writers such as Brown, Cooper, and Neal were also aware of how an assemblage of other traumas melded with the sickening legacy of Native American removal and genocide, deeply marring America's fledgling historical and cultural heritage. With this realization in mind, I examine how the combined environmental, national, and gothic concerns of these writers reveal other specters, other wrongs that are no less haunting to the nation's cultural psyche.

BROCKEN BROWN AND THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL GOTHIC

Arguing for a more overt ecocritical focus on the gothic, Tom J. Hillard writes that, "Because Gothic literature is so obsessed with fears of all types, the Gothic provides a useful lens for understanding the ways that many

authors—regardless of when they are writing—represented fears and anxieties about the natural world."[4] Such a concern with how the gothic reveals unease about the nonhuman environment is a productive consideration. It is equally vital, however, to examine how writers have appropriated aspects of the environment as figures for a range of social specters, especially those hauntings originating from the guilt and trauma associated with oppression—both human and nonhuman. In paying particular attention to the historical contexts of such works we also stand to learn much about the development of a host of ideas about the environment as it takes on significations that often influence the human conception, and treatment, of the land.

To locate the beginnings of this developing environmental gothic in American fiction we must first look to a novel read by both Neal and Cooper—Charles Brocken Brown's *Edgar Huntly* (1799). Brown's book occupies a unique position in American gothic literature, embodying for the first time many of those elements found in later attempts to capture and comment on uniquely American social anxieties. *Edgar Huntly* is a bewildering narrative in which the title character relates his experiences pursuing the mysterious figure of Clithero, fights Delaware Indians, and fends off vicious panthers in a Pennsylvania wilderness far more psychological than tangible. It is a novel littered with gothic conventions taken to extremes and modified to create a new American strain of suspense. Brown makes his intentions clear in his famous prefatory remarks, proclaiming that rather than adhere to European gothic conventions, American writers should concern themselves with "the perils of the western wilderness . . . and, for a native of America to overlook these, would admit of no apology."[5]

Brown's artistically influential, but commercially unpopular, works of early American fiction blazed the trail for the achievements of his more well-known literary descendants such as Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville. The success of these writers to build upon Brown's work is evident both in the persistence of Brown's gothic conventions in contemporary American texts and in the statements of critics such as Leslie Fiedler who writes that "of all the fiction of the West, our own is most deeply influenced by the gothic, is almost essentially a gothic one. In general the European gothic reaches the level of important art only in poetry and drama, not in fiction; in America quite the opposite is the case."[6] American gothic fiction, as Fiedler notes, constitutes some of the nation's best literary art, and any full consideration of its origins and development must take into account Neal and Cooper, who did much in the 1820s to revive and revise Brown's advancement toward a uniquely American gothic environment.

While Brown's *Edgar Huntly* has proven to be an influential attempt at a truly American gothic novel, his Pennsylvania wilderness remains an

unconvincing landscape. Despite his mentions of rattlesnakes and dramatic scenes of panther attacks (Brown's monstrous panthers serve mainly as uncanny doubles for his often equally animalistic Delaware Indians), his American wilderness is more European in feel and probably drawn in part from his reading of Ann Radcliffe. Additionally, Brown meant for his landscape to mirror, in its baffling geography and subterranean darkness, the confused state of its narrator's mind, and while he succeeds in this mission, he does so at the expense of the landscape itself, which loses its American essence in the exchange.

This loss of authenticity so irritated Cooper that he, in his preface to *The Spy* (1821), criticizes Brown's book, writing that in one pivotal scene the novel, "contains an American, a savage, a wild cat, and a tomahawk, in a conjunction that never did, nor ever will occur."[7] In an 1824 review, Neal—writing with characteristic immodesty and force—addressed both Cooper's and his own debts to Brown. "Irving," writes Neal, "is not alone under this charge of purloining from him. . . . There are Neal and Cooper—both of them have stolen his catamounts, and played the devil with his Indians. Neal however, is content with 'catching the idea'—and working it up, till it scratches his own fingers. But Cooper—so far as he can—steals the broom ready made!"[8] Neal's mention of "stolen . . . catamounts" refers to Cooper's dramatic panther attack scene in *The Pioneers*, a scene that in fairness is distinct from those in Brown's *Edgar Huntly*. Predictably, Neal offers a kinder evaluation of his own handling of Brown's material, but at moments he too goes well beyond simply "catching the idea."

FAILED REPRESSION AND NEAL'S HAUNTED TREE

Logan: A Family History (1822)—Neal's own dark work of frontier gothic—borrows both Brown's dreamlike atmosphere and key elements of the gothic landscape. The result of this borrowing is a disturbing narrative that betrays linkages between environmental and racial anxieties in America's popular consciousness. Neal, in *Logan*, modifies Brown's wilderness-based dreamscapes for his own perplexing narrative set on the pre-Revolutionary frontier. *Logan* is a dizzying amalgam of nightmarish landscapes and brutal violence, all of which involves the enigmatic figure of Logan, the chief of the Mingos, who is actually an English nobleman in disguise and bent on avenging the slaughter of his American Indian wife's family. It is, as Benjamin Lease writes, "a prose poem of the blood seeking to convey an overpowering sense of the sublime—and of the horrible."[9] And in this novel of so much disturbing power, Neal set about refashioning one of *Edgar Huntly*'s most potent

American gothic elements, Brown's "haunted Elm."[10] In doing so, Neal borrows from Brown a key link between the gothic and the environment, a spectral tree rooted in a landscape of oppression and that recurs in works by a diverse array of later American writers such as Hawthorne ("Roger Malvin's Burial"), Charles Chesnutt ("Po' Sandy"), and Toni Morrison (*Beloved*).

Eric Savoy, in constructing a theory of haunting in American gothic literature writes, "If allegory is the strangest house of fiction, haunted by a referentiality that struggles to return in a narrative mode that is committed to repress what it is compelled to shadow forth . . . then it is not surprising that the house is the most persistent site, object, structural analogue, and trope of American gothic's allegorical turn."[11] While Savoy's take on the prevalence and function of haunted structures in American gothic is persuasive, given the importance of the nonhuman environment in U. S. literary history, I suggest a broader definition of what constitutes a haunted "house" in American fiction. In *Edgar Huntly*, for example, the novel's title character roams his rural neighborhood mourning the recent death of his friend, Waldegrave, who was mysteriously murdered at the foot of a majestic roadside elm. Serving variously as a signifier of murder and as a physical axis from which key moments of the narrative arise, this tree becomes simultaneously one of the focal points of Brown's novel, a living grave marker for Waldegrave (whose name means "grave in the woods"), and a recurring psychic landmark in a chaotic landscape of slaughter and confusion.

Francesca Orestano makes note of how Neal adapts Brown's aesthetic, writing that "Brown's gothic landscape . . . is gradually transformed and 'naturalized' by Neal into familiar settings. . . . The gory theatricals and supernatural props of the frontier are ultimately dwarfed by the effect they are wont to provoke; and when they are gradually replaced by the tame, natural, familiar landscape of New England, it becomes clear that the naïve gothic mechanism reveals the horror at work in the inner landscape of man."[12] In *Logan*, for example, Neal appropriates and expands upon Brown's haunted elm when he has the bewildered and bloody Harold—who in a passage highly reminiscent of Brown's fiction—finds himself

> under that scathed tree, to whose history, and that of the bleak and barren solitude about, were allied ten thousand frightful stories of Indian superstition—a place that, for ages, the beast and the bird of prey had haunted for food—a tree that had been there—the same, unchanged, unshattered, unbowed—with never a branch, nor a leaf the less (so said the oldest of the red men,) from beyond time—centuries had rolled away—storm after storm had beaten upon it—rain after rain—and yet was it, forever, unworn and unwet—again and again, had it been in a blaze, from head to foot with the lightning of heaven . . . yet this tree, this old and awful, sapless and withered tree, had withstood it *all*—*all* the

> elements—*all* the principles of decay—had stood there, like an indestructible shadow, undiminished, unshaken, unsubdued! Not a blade of grass lay within its shade. The very soil was brown, and hot, and arid, like pulverised iron.[13]

Neal offers a living-dead tree that despite its extreme age, its exposure to the violence of the land, and its withered appearance remains indestructible as it violates "the principles of decay." Neal's dramatically gothic tree (unlike Brown he does not assign it a species) is more than simply an eerie signpost in the forest. It is an embodiment and location of brutality in an already disturbing wilderness, a conduit of violence itself immune to injury. In shaping this tree, Neal emphasizes its status as a platform for bloodshed. It is a haunted house for the nonhuman, a location from which "the beast and the bird of prey had haunted [not hunted] for food." It is also host to various forms of negation that nest upon its branches: despite its years and its exposure to the elements the tree remains "unchanged, unshattered, unbowed;" "unworn and unwet;" and "undiminished, unshaken, unsubdued;" characteristics combining to create a tree invoking the additional negated terms of the uncanny and the undead.

Writing about the trope of the haunted house in American fiction, Savoy argues that they "are structures whose solid actuality dissolves as they accommodate (and bring to spectacular figure) a psychic imperative—the impossibility of forgetting. . . . The psychic 'house,' turns toward the gothic only when it is 'haunted' by the return of the repressed, a return that impels spectacular figures."[14] Neal's tree fully qualifies as such a structure, and is explicitly referred to as a "haunted tree" at various moments in the text.[15] Like all haunted structures it is a repository of repressed history, particularly the historical oppression of the "red men" who mention the tree in "ten thousand frightful stories of Indian superstition."[16] In fact, where the function of Neal's haunted tree veers from that of Brown's similarly haunted elm is in the way that Neal plays with the concept of haunting. While Neal's tree, as described above, is indeed a form of spectral abode, it is also an image that haunts the minds of several figures in the book. Oscar, for instance, who near the end of the novel relates a nightmare to Harold, finds words insufficient to describe the scene and says, "Harold I think that I could sketch the place," and after Harold views the sketch, he too succumbs to its haunting presence and, as Neal writes, he "uttered an exclamation of astonishment—'That *tree!*—yes, I remember just such a tree as that, somewhere; but, for my life I cannot tell where I have seen it. It is associated too with something terribly indistinct in my fancy, something that turns my heart cold, when I look upon it.'"[17]

The manner in which the image of Neal's haunted tree echoes in the dreams and tales of various characters speaks to what Savoy argues is a "failure of

repression and forgetting—a failure upon which the entire tradition of the gothic in America is predicated."[18] Savoy connects this inability to repress past injustices with racial oppression, and such a linkage suits Neal's *Logan*; indeed, it is the murder of the supposed Native American leader that has so deeply stained the image of the haunted tree in blood. But haunted natural elements such as Neal's tree have a further, more strategic purpose. They, as Savoy argues, "invoke . . . the specter of Otherness that haunts the house of national narrative—in a tropics that locates the traumatic return of the historical preterite in an allegorically preterited mode."[19] This very invocation of the Other occurs in pronounced relation to the murdered Logan, a situation made clear when a serious-minded Indian hunter terrifies the other members of this tribe by reporting that he has seen "in the deepest recesses of their hunting ground, near the haunted tree, the slaughtered Logan, himself! that he was wrapped in the habiliments of war—angry—bleeding and impatient!"[20] Thus Neal's haunted tree becomes a signpost for the return of the repressed Other, here Logan (who, as it happens, is neither dead nor actually a Native American). As Teresa A. Goddu contends, ". . . *Logan* discloses that national identity is founded on the gothic. The novel argues that the abjection of the Indian lies at the heart of a national narrative of expansion and consolidation, and that this narrative depends on a set of gothic conventions of intelligibility."[21] Hence Neal's incorporation of a haunted American environment into his fiction goes well beyond simply cribbing trees from Brocken Brown. In writing about Neal's *Logan* in relation to what he terms a "dynamic of deterritorialization," Jonathan Elmer suggests, "If apocalypse and discovery become indistinguishable, the land can be understood as simultaneously pre- and post-historical, unfixed by temporal codes altogether. And as with the land, so with the prophet or visionary left alone in it: the dilations of time and space that affect the one also affect the other."[22] And one of Neal's most powerful contributions to imagining such a temporally and spatially unfixed environment occurs when he expands upon the idea of a haunted structure (be it a house or a tree) to incorporate a broader literary canvas, a gesture best viewed in his 1825 novel, *Brother Jonathan: or, The New Englanders.*

GRAVEYARD AS MIDDLE LANDSCAPE IN NEAL'S *BROTHER JONATHAN*

Not until Cooper's Littlepage Trilogy (1845–1846) did the literature of the United States see a unified work of fiction remotely as complex, ambitious, and demanding as John Neal's expansive *Brother Jonathan.* It is also one of the most emphatic, even shrill examples of U.S. nationalistic literature,

making it an especially fertile work for examining the ways Neal attempted to write his fledgling country into cultural standing. Published in London by Blackwood, the 1,300 page *Brother Jonathan* is in some ways a coming-of-age tale. The novel follows the path of young Walter Harwood, who at the beginning of the American Revolution seeks to join General Washington's army. Harwood experiences run-ins with New York City prostitutes and even encounters a soon-to-be-executed Nathan Hale. Neal's hodgepodge of a novel also includes aspects of the sentimental romance as Harwood has an ill-fated affair with Emma before returning to his New England home to marry his real love, Edith. As critics note, what makes the tale most bewildering is the overwhelming addition of gothic elements and figures, including secret identities, murders, and American Indian witches. Donald A. Sears sums up the rambling novel this way: "Walter's initiation into the city, war, and passion has awakened the sleeping genius in him."[23] *Brother Jonathan* is, however, as difficult to accurately summarize as it is to categorize, and attempts to encapsulate its plot are inevitably unsatisfying because so much of the novel concerns vignettes of American character, atmosphere, and place. "It consists," writes Francesca Orestano, "of a thick, spiced compound of gothicism, local colour, customs carefully described, dialects carefully recorded, glimpses and scenes from the history of the American Revolution."[24] As Sears argues, "The problem with the novel was one of focus. Brilliant yet exasperating, *Brother Jonathan* was many things, but no one thing for long."[25] Following the failures of his previous novels, Neal wrote *Brother Jonathan* as more than just a response to Sydney Smith's well-known provocation that America lacked intellectual promise. It is a three-volume shriek meant to be heard on both sides of the Atlantic, a cry proclaiming that not only U.S. literature but its culture in general deserved recognition as unique, valuable, and ingenious.

While Neal's novel lacks the narrative coherence of *The Last of the Mohicans* (which was published the following year), it shares a number of gothic motifs that Cooper infused into much of his earlier fiction. Like Neal's *Logan*, his *Brother Jonathan* is a work obsessed with violence, and as with Cooper's *Mohicans*, Neal's book is at key moments, especially concerned with the connections to be found between this violence, the human community, and the nonhuman environment, especially in terms of what cultural geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan calls "middle landscapes."[26] Tuan posits that humans, in finding a viable halfway point between wilderness and the "artificial city," have created a series of environmental borderlands that include everything from farmland to city gardens to theme parks. These middle landscapes, in Tuan's words, "show how humans can escape nature's rawness without moving so far from it as to appear to deny roots in the organic world."[27]

Neal seems intuitively aware of the power certain middle landscapes have to build and control human communities, and he focuses on one type in particular—the graveyard. At the novel's opening, Neal makes clear that a spiritual connection with the dead and the land is a path to power for those willing to exploit the fears of the community. The farmer/preacher Abraham Harwood is apparently given to "a sort of epilepsy" that may or may not actually invoke visions, but either way his relation of these visions allow "him power over his people," among whom "no one of his trembling hearers doubted him."[28] Abraham Harwood's visions are unsettling, especially as they invoke the inevitability of death with the suggestion of an invisible spiritual world surrounding the living who are doomed to eventually join its ranks. Emerging from an apparent seizure to address his flock, Harwood claims to have witnessed

> a procession of dead people; the fathers, mothers, and little children of his congregation—passing the very windows of the house, where they were assembled; and looking in, at such as them as were to die, in the following year; or, moving slowly through the dim wood, visible from the door of the meeting-house, in front of the pulpit, with a new coffin upon their shoulders—on their way to the grave-yard.[29]

Here Neal hints at an eternal spectral linkage between the living and the dead, between human community and the land, a linkage made explicit by the spirits of the dead carrying a coffin through the woods to the melded earth of the graveyard and valid—because of its effect on his parishioners—regardless of whether Harwood's visions are real or simply demagoguery. In examining the development of Neal's fiction, Donald Ringe writes that Neal "distrusted intellectual patterning in fiction and developed his novels through the ongoing experience of his characters."[30] In writing about a passage in Neal's *Rachel Dyer* (1828) that is akin to the one found in *Brother Jonathan*, Ringe contends that Neal's theory of fiction privileges the experiences of his characters over material reality, which forces him to "accept the sights and sounds they perceived as an accurate record of their experience. The book is filled, therefore, with passages that detail the signs and portents, shapes and apparitions which the common belief of the time accepted as objectively real."[31]

In one of *Brother Jonathan*'s most affecting passages, we encounter a strong example of how Neal's theory of fiction (as argued by Ringe) intertwines with Tuan's idea of the middle landscape to reveal a decidedly gothic environmental imagination. Neal describes a landscape that is both disturbed and disturbing: "a grave-yard;—a barren, bleak, and savage-looking place; dreary, as death. . . . It had been, a nursery: it was now, a burial-ground;—a

place of common sepulture. It had been rich and fertile;—green, to a proverb; it was now quite overgrown. . . . It had been a smooth, wide level: it was now, broken up into graves; their wooden tablets mouldering away on the damp earth; or half buried, in the harsh, wild grass."[32] This setting had once been a different type of middle landscape, an orchard, "a place of remarkable beauty," but a murder had tainted the soil; "blood had been shed, unlawfully, upon that land," and Neal writes that it was now characterized by "desolation [and] the herbage of death breaking out . . . with a bright, and unnatural, fierce bloom."[33] The terrain displays upon its surface proof of the sin beneath the grass, and it is tempting to view Neal's funereal landscape as a microcosm for the legacy of the American colonial project as a whole, a melding of human and natural history in which the earth is simultaneously fertilized and poisoned with the blood of conquered and conqueror alike.

Magnifying the power of this grotesque landscape, Neal relates that while the former orchard's status as an aged crime scene and graveyard labels it as a corrupt landscape, both in the memories of the settlers and in the biology of the flora, the place still serves a practical purpose for the living when on Sundays a crowd of parishioners "take their lunch, under the old apple trees, in the grave-yard."[34] Hence, while Neal's American soil bears the stigma of moral pollution, it remains a place of value to the devout churchgoers who lunch beneath its twisted trees. Neal's fallen orchard invites Edenic parallels, but as is common with many of his symbolic landscapes, it is not only indicative of its own past fall but also of future corruption and violence. For as the narrative progresses, Neal reveals another, more prophetic function of the graveyard: it serves—in the minds of the superstitious—as a retroactive omen of the impending Revolutionary War. Neal writes, "there were few able to go to the place, unmoved; and long—long after it was over, when the war broke out; many a serious man spoke of it, as one of the numberless prodigies, which, when they happened, had been gazed upon, by the believers, on every side, as the forerunners of that war."[35]

As with the specious veracity of the preacher Harwood's visions, the status of the haunted orchard as a portent of the Revolutionary War is contingent more on the beliefs of those witnessing the event than on any actual validity. That Neal would charge his graveyard with such symbolic power is unsurprising given his attention to how human identity is influenced by the landscape upon which it subsists. The graveyard is one of the most symbolically charged landscapes of the American literary imagination; it is a garden planted with gravestones marking the place and date of the individual's demise and the corpse's rebirth (through decay) as a literal part of the land. Graveyards function as Tuan's middle landscapes, places that are the result of human civilization and that in their multiplicity of significations are gestures

of escaping "nature's rawness" while also accepting the organic inevitability of death.[36] Graves mark the crossroads between states of being, between living and dead, between human and nonhuman, and as graves are eternally veiled by the very ground of their burial, they are left interned in a state of perpetual decomposition and recomposition, as the cadaver transforms from human to earth.

COOPER'S BLOOD-TAINTED LAND

This physical transformation of corpse into soil recurs in a number of nineteenth-century American texts. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, for example, builds upon the human/environmental linkages presented in Neal's *Logan* and *Brother Jonathan*, and while there is no evidence that Cooper read either of Neal's works, *Mohicans* nevertheless operates within the same environmentally sophisticated tradition. In *Mohicans* Cooper explores a similar absorption of bodies into the land, and like Neal figures it as a transformation borne of a violence that continues to haunt those who walk the unmarked cemetery that constitutes the wilds of colonial America.

Despite, or perhaps because of, their similar literary objectives and traits, Neal did not (at least openly) admire Cooper's work. As his reviews of Cooper's books make clear, while Neal lauded his predecessor Brown, he felt no reason to express admiration for his famous contemporary. In the three reviews he wrote that touch on Cooper's novels, Neal engages in what George Dekker and John P. McWilliams characterize as "an entertaining amalgam of nonsense, insight, envy, humour and a refreshingly colloquial prose style."[37] In his reviews addressing Cooper's *The Spy* and *Lionel Lincoln*, Neal describes Cooper's writing as "full of stage-tricks and claptrap" and "greatly overrated by his countrymen." But Neal saves his most virulent words for his review of *The Last of the Mohicans*, which he terms "clearly by much the worst of Mr. Cooper's performances." Interestingly, Neal criticizes *Mohicans* in part for exhibiting traits not uncommon in his own frontier romances: "Fancy has entire possession of the field, and it is seldom that any thing occurs which looks like the result of observation and experience."[38] In fact, while Neal, in this *London Magazine* review condemns Cooper's portrayal of the American natural world as unrealistic and overwrought, Neal's own *Brother Jonathan* (published a year earlier), shares (and even amplifies) some of these same characteristics. *Brother Jonathan*'s blood-stained orchard is similar to scenes found in *Mohicans*, and in each novel American environments are characterized by both their sublime beauty and their association with great suffering.

Like *Brother Jonathan*, Cooper's *Mohicans* recasts Brown's haunted landscapes while furthering the idea that human violence has infected the American frontier. One example of this tendency occurs when on their way to reunite the Munro sisters with their father at the besieged Fort William Henry, Chingachgook, Uncas, and Natty Bumppo stop to camp. Heyward and the Munro sisters dismount and sit upon a grassy "hillock" to rest, while Natty relates to them his role years before in helping erect a blockhouse at the site and how he, Chingachgook, and their allies took part in a pitched battle there with the Mohawks. Natty then tells his listeners, "I buried the dead with my own hands, under that very little hillock, where you have placed yourselves; and no bad seat does it make neither, though it be raised by the bones of mortal men." Natty explains that he buried the Mohawks so their corpses would not "be torn asunder by beasts, or . . . bleach in the rains," and when Heyward and the Munro sisters start at the morbid nature of their chosen resting spot, Natty smiles and says, "They are gone, and they are harmless . . . they'll never shout the warwhoop, nor strike a blow with the tomahawk, again!" In burying his deceased enemies, Natty accepts his past violence by imagining that his foes, whom he describes as "creatures who had spirits like myself," have obtained peace and will not return from the dead to assail their enemies.[39]

While not formally recognizable as a cemetery, the unmarked graveyard of Natty's sepulchral hillock functions in a fashion similar to the more traditional graveyard of *Brother Jonathan*. Its status as what Tuan calls a middle landscape is arguable, but this pastoral hillock does involve Tuan's larger contention that the relationship between humans and the landscapes they occupy are rarely as passive or as beneficent as they may outwardly appear. "A natural environment," writes Tuan, "can itself seem both nourishing and stable to its human habitants. However, once a people start to change the forest, even if it is only the making of a modest clearing for crops and a village, the forest can seem to turn into a malevolent force that relentlessly threatens to move in and take over. . . . Carving a space out of nature, then, does not ensure stability and ease. To the contrary, it can make people feel more than ever vulnerable."[40] The decayed ruins of Natty's blockhouse coupled with the manner in which the informal graves have taken on the guise of natural hills speaks to this reclaiming by the land.

In the case of Cooper's *Mohicans* the openings carved into the forest by colonial violence include both the agricultural and residential spaces Tuan invokes as well as the metaphorical spaces that allow for a human conception of the environment as a conquered land. In *Mohicans* much of that claiming and taming involves violence, particularly war. The traces of this violence, however, remain buried and obscured—like Natty's fallen foes—in the land upon which they died. As Savoy argues, however, it is the function of gothic

texts to force these repressed events and entities to the surface, complicating any sense of mastery. Cooper and Neal invoke a fear similar to that which Tuan suggests is inherent in the threat of a forest swallowing up its human invaders. Rather than growing over the scars of human alteration, in the case of *Mohicans* the forest opens old wounds for those who can read the signs on the land, thrusting the grotesque relics of human violence back into the light.

A striking example of how such a return of the repressed functions in *Mohicans* occurs when the party of travelers comes to a place that invokes painful memories for the war-weary Natty. Stopping at the entrance to a gorge, Natty waits until the rest of the group catches up and then says, "It is easy to know the path-ways, and to find the licks and water courses of the wilderness . . . but who that saw this spot, could venture to say that a mighty army was at rest among yonder silent trees and barren mountains." He then points to where "a little basin of water reflected the stars from its placid bosom" and says, "here is the 'bloody pond'; and I am on ground that I have not only often travelled, but over which I have fou't the enemy, from the rising to the setting sun!" Traumatized by his role in ambushing a group of French soldiers while they sat eating, Natty then tells the violent story of the otherwise pastoral landscape before them: "When all was over, the dead, and some say the dying, were cast into that little pond. These eyes have seen its waters coloured with blood, as natural water never yet flowed from the bowels of the 'arth." The young Duncan Heyward speaks of the matter almost romantically, commenting that "It was a convenient, and, I trust, will prove a peaceful grave for a soldier!" but Natty who in this dialog displays evidence of posttraumatic stress, rejects the idea that there was any glory in the matter: "There are them in the camp, who say and think, a man to lie still, should not be buried while the breath is still in the body; and certain it is, that in the hurry of that evening the doctors had but little time to say who was living, and who was dead."[41]

After relating his doubts about the propriety of the mass burial of French soldiers in the pond, Natty is startled by the appearance in the darkness of an unknown figure walking along the shore. Heyward comments that it is doubtful that "any are as houseless as ourselves, in this dreary forest," but Natty, displaying the extent to which he is haunted by his complicity in the cruelty that fed so much blood into the pond, says, "Such as he may care but little for house or shelter, and night dew can never wet a body that passes its days in the water." Natty, afraid the figure is the ghost of one of his foes, grips Heyward's shoulder with such force that the young man becomes aware of "how much superstitious terror had gotten the mastery of a man usually so dauntless."[42] While Renée L. Bergland, in discussing Cooper's work, focuses on how the figure of the spectral Native American is related to gender politics,[43]

passages such as the one at the "bloody pond" reveal that Cooper's national house is haunted by a range of ghosts with a range of ethnicities and tragic pasts.

Natty's feeling about the spiritual disposition of those he has killed shifts dramatically between the scene at the "grassy sepulchre" and that of the "bloody pond" found only a few pages later in the following chapter. In juxtaposing these two scenes concerned with the handling of the enemy dead, Cooper emphasizes the extent to which civility and ritual impact the way that Natty (and ostensibly others who shared his experiences) views a landscape that is to anyone else a lush realm of forests and waterways. These passages also serve as reminders of just how much the gothic informed Cooper's historical romances, and are akin to what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick terms a "Gothic topography," a landscape that consists of "the ravages of a noiseless, subterraneous, invisible disease, the threatening presence of the unintelligible and the incommunicable" that is indicative of a "many layered past that is latent beneath the present." In Cooper's novel this "subterraneous, invisible disease" is the presence of past violence and cruelty housed in the land itself, of grotesque bodies buried beneath a picturesque scene. Natty, complicit in these acts of violence, becomes more than a simple tracker; he becomes an interpreter of what is beneath the ground as well as on the surface. He bears a dark history triggered by deceptively peaceful landmarks. Applying this concept to a host of gothic surfaces, Sedgwick notes how instances of writing or marking work to speak the unspeakable: "The marks traced out in earth, flesh, paper, architecture, and landscape are often not part of any language, but, rather, circles, blots, a cross, a person's image, furrows, and folds. Whether stamps of authenticity or brands of shame, and however rich in symbolism, they act as pointers and labels to their material ground."[44] In the case of *Mohicans*, Natty is one of the few who can read these "marks traced out in the earth" and that fact enhances the recognition of a repressed history of violence and injustice buried just beneath the verdant skin of the American wilderness.

Four chapters after the scene at the "bloody pond," Cooper offers a third and even more striking example of how human blood and the echoes of violence meld with the landscape of colonial New York. In the novel's well-known fictionalization of the massacre at Fort William Henry, Cooper takes pains to connect the human suffering with the wilderness upon which it unfolds. Unlike the scenes at the "grassy sepulchre" and the "bloody pond," the description of the massacre at Fort William Henry plays out in the narrative present and reveals up close a case in which the cruelty and gore of horrifying violence mars the land and the minds of those unfortunate enough to witness the event, creating a strong example of what

Sedgwick terms a "Gothic topography" of physical, psychological, and geological disturbance.

Cooper's handling of the actual violence of the massacre is complex. As the defeated British soldiers and settlers (many of them women and children) leave the fort with a promise of safe passage from their French and Huron enemies, Cooper opens the attack with the horrifying murder of a British American mother and baby by a nameless Huron who along with the others of this tribe has been stoked to a bloodthirsty fury by the "fatal and artful eloquence" of the vengeful Magua. Cooper then follows with one of the most nightmarish scenes in American literature, in which the group of defenseless Colonials are slaughtered by two thousand Hurons who continue to mutilate their corpses long after they are dead, and who, after spilling a "torrent" of blood upon the ground, "kneeled to the earth, and drank freely, exultingly, hellishly, of the crimson tide." Cooper then backs away from the gore of the moment, following through with his promise that "we shall not dwell on the revolting horrors that succeeded" by instead focusing the rest of the chapter on Magua's kidnapping of Cora and Alice.[45]

In the chapter that immediately follows, Cooper caps his series of disturbing scenes in which human violence becomes interwoven into the fabric of the land. He opens by describing the site of the massacre three days after the capture of Fort William Henry. The Hurons are gone, but they have left a deep mark on the earth, which is "possessed by stillness and death." Along with the ruins of the fort, Cooper relates that

> A frightful change had also occurred in the season. The sun had hid its warmth behind an impenetrable mass of vapour, and hundreds of human forms, which had blackened beneath the fierce heats of August, were now stiffening in the deformity, before the blasts of a premature November. . . . The crowded mirror of the Horican was gone; and, in its place, the green and angry waters lashed the shores, as if indignantly casting back its impurities to the polluted strand. . . . here and there, a dark green tuft rose in the midst of the desolation; the earliest fruits of a soil that had been fattened with human blood.[46]

As with the earlier scenes in which Natty's anxiety about leaving bodies unburied becomes indicative of his own war trauma, so does the blood and exposed corpses of the massacre reveal a trauma inflicted upon the earth itself. Indeed, the impact of the atrocity is so powerful that it affects the weather, prematurely altering the season from summer to winter, with no autumn in between. Cooper makes it clear that the violence of the massacre will not just disappear once the surface evidence fades; it will endure beneath the thin veil of the soil, haunting those who can read its marks and serving as a pollutant, an insidious fertilizer, giving rise to future "fruits."

Writing about Neal's and Cooper's use of historical romances of the Revolutionary War to address and shape a forward-looking U.S. nationalistic identity, Joseph J. Letter argues that "suffering soldiers were more than fodder for nationalistic propaganda. They represented a complex relationship between historical events and the processes of natural decay, and they further served a cultural function by establishing the foundation for a new national literature."[47] As Letter argues, such cultural and natural factors merge in works of early national fiction, and these mergers point to a concern by Neal, Cooper, and others with reconciling the physical nature of the new nation with its emergent social mythology, both of which were key parts of the conscious creation of a national literary tradition. So for Cooper and Neal, who saw their work as the creation of a nationalistic culture, the problems of an unstable national identity and the breakdown of physical boundaries between people and the land were of particular concern. The feasibility of marking off a national literature and the marrying of Americans with the land of North America were problematic. Yet, as their novels demonstrate, they address not so much a traditional concept of hybridity as a form of absorption, an incorporation of human blood into the land at moments and locations of intense violence. In these novels, the resulting mixture of blood and land promotes an interrelation between the two entities, forcing a recognition of the artificiality of conventional boundaries between human and nonhuman.

Ultimately, Neal's and Cooper's invention of an American landscape haunted by human trauma is key not only to their conceptions of an American environmental aesthetic but also to their influence upon those writers who followed in their wake. They both conceive of an American landscape that is more than simply a backdrop to human drama and that contains much more than what is found upon the surface. Each of these authors demonstrates how human violence taints the soil and the climate, leaving a corruption *in* the land that is often indicated by disturbing signs found *on* the land, resulting in an environmental memory steeped in and stained by suffering and injustice. In these novels, the blood and corpses borne of violence and injustice poison the soil by warping the terrain and by serving as psychic revenants that rise in the memories of those who know its bloodstained history.

NOTES

1. Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (Hanover NH: Dartmouth College University Press, 2000), 4.

2. See Matthew Wynn Sivils, "Native American Sovereignty and Old Deb in Charles Brockden Brown's *Edgar Huntly*," *American Transcendental Quarterly*,

15.4 (2001): 293–304. For other views on this character, see Janie Hinds, *Early American Literature* 39.2 (2004): 323–354 and Andrew Newman, "'Light might possibly be requisite': *Edgar Huntly*, Regional History, and Historicist Criticism," *Early American Studies* 8.2 (2010): 322–357.

3. Robert Montgomery Bird, *Nick of the Woods* (London: Ward and Lock, 1855), v.

4. Tom J. Hillard, "'Deep Into That Darkness Peering': An Essay on Gothic Nature" *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 16.4 (2009): 685–695, quotation on 689.

5. Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly, or Memoirs of a Sleep-walker.* Eds. Sydney J. Krause and S. W. Reid, (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1984), 3.

6. Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), 142.

7. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground.* Eds. James P. Elliott, James H. Pickering, Lance Schachterle, and Jeffrey Walker (New York: AMS Press, 2002), 2.

8. Quoted in George Dekker and John P. McWilliams, *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan, 1985), 80.

9. Benjamin Lease, *that wild fellow John Neal, and the American Literary Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 89.

10. Charles Brockden Brown, *Edgar Huntly,* 14.

11. Eric Savoy, "The Face of the Tenant: A Theory of American Gothic," In *American Gothic: New Interventions in a National Narrative.* Eds. Robert K. Martin and Eric Savoy. (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1998), 3–19, quotation on 9.

12. Francesca Orestano, "The Old World and the New in the National Landscapes of John Neal," In *Views of American Landscapes.* Eds. Mick Gidley and Robert Lawson-Peebles. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 129–145, quotation on 139.

13. John Neal, *Logan, a Family History.* 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Carey and Lea, 1822), 1.157.

14. Savoy, "The Face of the Tenant," 9–10.

15. See Neal, *Logan*, 1.162, 1.174, and 1.183.

16. Ibid., 1.157.

17. Ibid., 2.329.

18. Savoy, "The Face of the Tenant," 4.

19. Ibid., 14.

20. Neal, *Logan*, 1.183.

21. Teresa A. Goddu, *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 53.

22. Jonathan Elmer, "Melancholy, Race, and Sovereign Exemption in Early American Fiction." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 40.1–2 (2006/2007): 151–170, quotations on 153 and 163.

23. Donald A. Sears, *John Neal* (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 74.

24. Orestano, "The Old World," 138.

25. Sears, *John Neal*, 73.

26. Yi-Fu Tuan, *Escapism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 24.
27. Ibid., 24–25.
28. John Neal, *Brother Jonathan: or, the New Englanders*. 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1825), 19.
29. Ibid., 19–20.
30. Donald A. Ringe, *American Gothic: Imagination and Reason in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1982), 119.
31. Ibid.
32. Neal, *Brother Jonathan*, 126.
33. Ibid., 130.
34. Ibid., 124.
35. Ibid., 130.
36. Tuan, *Escapism*, 24–25.
37. Dekker and McWilliams, *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage*, 80.
38. Quoted in Dekker and McWilliams, *Fenimore Cooper: The Critical Heritage*, 81, 83, and 85.
39. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans; a Narrative of 1757*, Eds. James Franklin Beard, James A. Sappenfield, and E. N. Feltskog (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983), 126–127.
40. Tuan, *Escapism*, 10.
41. Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 135–136.
42. Ibid., 136.
43. Bergland, *The National Uncanny*, 63–68, 83–107.
44. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 85–87, 153–154.
45. Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*, 175–176.
46. Ibid., 180–181.
47. Joseph J. Letter, "Past Presentisms: Suffering Soldiers, Benjaminian Ruins, and the Discursive Foundations of Early U.S. Historical Novels," *American Literature* 82.1 (2010): 29–55, quotation on 32.